

1931-1944

Who Remembers the Old Provo Sho-Boat?

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Suppose you watched as a 90-foot excursion-type pleasure craft glided through the waters of Utah Lake with up to 250 passengers engaged in dining, dancing or just plain sight-seeing and relaxation. Super, you'd say. What a blessing that Utah Valley has such a fine recreational asset!

The above is fantasy now, of course. But I have news for most of you. As local old-timers know,

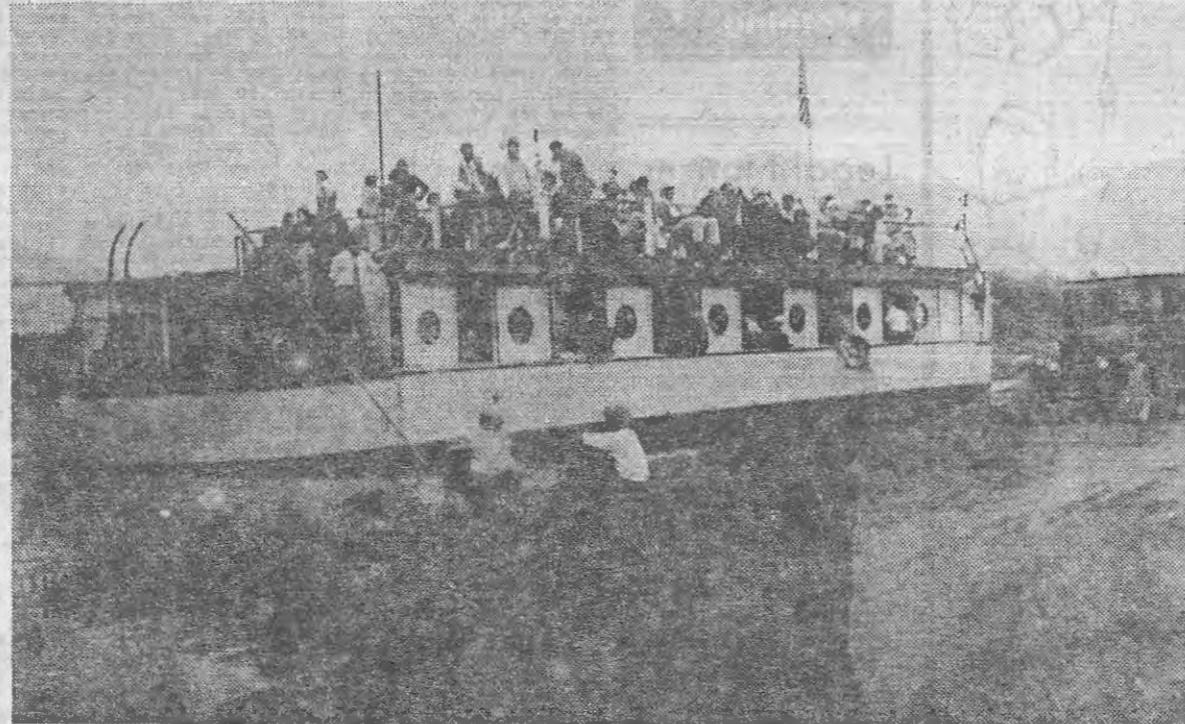
DID have such a boat ... reaching back more than a half-century!

The "S.S. Sho-Boat," also known as the Smith-Strong Boat, was operated from 1931 to 1944 by two Provoans, Hewitt M. Strong and Elmer J. Smith.

The Nov. 23 death of Smith (Strong had died in 1982) revived memories of the Sho-Boat and the colorful and romantic chapter it wrote in Utah Valley history.

The two enterprising men built the craft in 1929-31, refusing to be discouraged by the dawn of the Great Depression. They did most of the construction themselves, importing lumber as necessary.

The Strongs and Smiths were fast friends and the project tied them even closer together. Etta Simmons Strong, Hewitt's widow, says she and Elmer's wife, the late Elma Dunn Smith, assisted in many ways and ran the concessions aboard the boat. The youngsters — Roland and Elmer Jr. and Norma



Picture of the old Sho-Boat brings back pleasant memories.

Smith (Wright) — were part of the team as they became old enough to help.

The diesel-powered Sho-Boat made a scheduled excursion to Rock (Bird) Island on Sundays, roughly from May to September.

Otherwise its cruises were chartered for daytime or moonlight parties by private groups — civic and women's clubs, Brigham Young University, business and industrial companies, church and school classes,

etc.

In the dozen years of Sho-Boat operation, there were no fatalities nor serious injuries, says Mrs. Strong. "On one or two occasions, somebody leaped into the water and tried to outswim

the boat, but with no actual safety problem."

I personally recall a moonlight cruise employees of The Daily Herald and their partners took about 1940. We were really impressed with the Sho-Boat's hardwood dance floor on the lower deck, the dining facilities, the stage for plays or bandstand, and the big observation deck which also was used for dancing.

An ornate steering wheel at the helm was an admired show-piece.

I never saw the boat when the American Flag wasn't flying. Smith and Strong usually wore their commodore uniforms on cruises and their wives were dressed in sailor suits, giving the excursion an added touch of nautical class.

The two owners operated smaller boats before and after the Sho-Boat venture. They were enthusiastic boosters of Utah Lake as a recreational resource.

The Sho-Boat, incidentally, was built with a relatively-flat bottom which enabled it to navigate in as little as 18 inches of water. During the drought year of 1933, water receded to "bare ground" in parts of the lake. The owners had to anchor the boat in sufficiently-deep water near Lehi to prevent damage.

The Sho-Boat had one of its last major flings during construction of Geneva Steel when plant executives and guests held a memorable cruise.

In 1944, Strong and Smith de-



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cided to retire the boat. They "Drydocked" it amid the willows and sand near the mouth of Provo River where it had been built 15 years previous. In the eventual salvage process much of the useable lumber went into construction of boat facilities at the harbor and a home built by Smith.

Unhappily, somebody purloined the beautiful steering wheel. I've a suggestion for the person who has it: Descendants of Hewitt M. Strong are planning a Sho-Boat memorial at the Strong estate in Orem.

Anchors and other memorabilia will be included. Why don't you return the wheel anonymously as an act of Christmas good-will and supply the finishing touch for the monument?